

Putting the “Age” into Agenda: How Demographic Ageing Became an Issue of EU Concern

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Abstract

EMILY LINES: Putting the “Age” into Agenda: How Demographic Ageing Became a Topic
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The European Union has declared 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations with the goal of raising awareness about the growing ageing population and to promote a more active lifestyle for older generations. This European Year highlights a different aspect of the demographic change going on in Europe, when usually most attention is placed on the declining fertility rate. But why is the EU addressing this issue now? Has the ageing population always been a concern? This paper will work towards answering those questions and will provide a historical overview of how this issue has emerged on the EU agenda by using a five-step policy process.

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List of Abbreviations

AAL	Ambient Assisted Living
DG	Directorate-General
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EU	European Union
EY1993	1993 European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations
EY2012	2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MIPAA	Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

I. Introduction

During the summer of 2011, the European Parliament and the European Council agreed to designate 2012 as the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (EY2012). The goal of this year is to promote and raise awareness about the ongoing demographic change occurring throughout the European Union (EU), but many people may wonder, “why now?” This decision is not completely random since it is likely most European citizens have heard something about demographic change or the increasing population over the age of 65 within the last few years. But the question still remains why the EU is now making a strong push towards addressing demographic change, particularly population ageing. Has the EU been ignoring a growing situation that could have been addressed years ago? Why has more not been done to try and reduce the impact of these demographic factors?

To put it plainly, the EU has been working towards addressing this demographic change. In fact, the EU has acknowledged demographic change since the late 1970s, the European Parliament has had an Intergroup on Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity since 1982, and the EU declared 1993 as the European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations (EY1993). Demographic change was not a secret to European officials, it was well known, but to the public eye, it may seem like population ageing is a new phenomenon of the 21st century. With 2012 being designated the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations, a second year of its kind, I was led to question how the topic of population ageing has evolved in the EU and reemerged in the form of active ageing.

To find the answers to my question, I will use the different stages of the policy process to describe the development of the EU's policies over the past 30 years. The first section will present the policy process using the ideas and theories developed by John Kingdon, Frank Baumgartner, and Bryan Jones. In the following section, I will explore the first stage of the policy process, problem definition, to provide a better understanding of Europe's demographic situation. The next two sections will split the demographic debate into two time periods: the 1980s and early 1990s, and the late 1990s and 2000s. For the final section, I will present my analysis of how this debate and policy process has developed and whether the EU has made progress in addressing this demographic challenge. For this, I have analyzed official EU documents and conducted qualitative expert interviews. This paper will offer an explanation of how demographic change, specifically the ageing of the population, has entered the EU agenda and why it has developed into a major concern of the EU.

II. Building a Framework

In order to explain how the discussion of demographic change has evolved at the EU level, I will use a simple five-step policy process consisting of problem definition, agenda setting, problem formulation, implementation, and policy evaluation.¹ This model provides a simple way of organizing and describing the series of events that have unfolded throughout the demographic debate. My paper will mainly focus on how the problem has been identified and defined, and how the problem has reached the EU agenda. I will look at policy formulation, but, as I will explain in more detail later, I will not devote much attention to policy implementation and evaluation due to the relative newness of the implemented policies. In the following section, I will provide an overall understanding of the policy making process to lay the groundwork for explaining the EU's situation.

A. Problem Definition

The first step in bringing an issue to the attention of a government or any policy making body is to identify and define the problem. Once the problem is fully understood, policy makers can have a clearer idea about what the situation is they need to address and then they can begin to think about the best ways to do so. An important distinction to remember is between problem definition and agenda setting. As explained by Janet Weiss: "Problem definition is concerned with the organization of a set of facts, beliefs and

¹ Volker Schneider and Frank Janning, *Politikfeldanalyse: Akteure, Diskurse und Netzwerke in der öffentlichen*

perceptions – how people think about circumstances. Agenda setting refers to the process by which some problems come to the public attention at given times and places.”² Problem definition is an important step of the policy process because it determines how far the issue moves through the policy process. It is likely that the same problems may be understood in several different ways.³ Therefore, if some policy makers view an issue differently from how it was presented, then the issue may never go further in the policy process.

When putting the policy process into the EU context, various actors can define the problem. For example, member states may already be addressing a problem that the EU later decides to address. International actors also play a role in defining a problem, such as the United Nations (UN). The UN Millennium Development Goals are an example because the UN defined ten problems and goals to address these problems. As a participant of the UN, the EU accepted the UN’s definition and then placed the issues on their agenda. In addition to these actors involved in defining an issue at the EU level, all of the EU governing bodies and outside groups like NGOs and lobby groups must also be considered. With all of these actors, how a problem is defined and presented to the EU is important in order to garner enough support and attention to further it in the EU policy process.

B. Agenda Setting

The next step is to put the problem on the government’s agenda and direct the attention of policy makers towards the topic. As defined by John Kingdon, the agenda is the

² David Dery, “Agenda Setting and Problem Definition,” *Policy Studies* 21:1 (2000): 37.

³ Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009): 44.

“list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time.”⁴ By having an agenda, the topics up for discussion are narrowed and more focus can be placed on specific issues.⁵ This is important since politicians cannot devote their attention to every issue, but must pick and choose what they will work on and support, which is particularly true at the EU level where they are dealing with a wide range of issues.⁶

Another element of agenda setting is establishing the issue as a priority. Even though something may be on the agenda, if it is at the bottom, then it will likely never be discussed. It is important that an item can move up the agenda and become a higher priority.⁷ There are various contributing factors affecting where an issue lands on the agenda, but I will only briefly explain three. For example, crises can quickly shift the focus of policy makers and the general public, creating sudden and immense pressure for change.⁸ These events may also serve as early warnings or can cause a change in how a policy is defined.⁹ Windows of opportunity are created through these events, which provide policy makers with the opportunity to push their proposals through because the topic is at the top of the agenda.¹⁰ These windows are not open long, but are a chance for policies to be approved and for action

⁴ John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (New York: Longman, 2003): 3.

⁵ Ibid., 3-4.

⁶ Schneider and Janning, *Politikfeldanalyse*, 53.

⁷ Sebastian Princen, “Agenda-Setting in the European Union: a theoretical explanation and agenda for research,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 14:1 (2007): 28.

⁸ Kingdon, *Agendas*, 16.

⁹ Ibid., 94, 98.

¹⁰ Ibid., 165.

to be taken.¹¹ In addition to focusing events and policy windows, changes in the national mood or public opinion can cause items to move up or down the agenda. If politicians realize their supporters are more interested in other issues, then their focus will also change. Finally, policy specialists may gain more knowledge about a particular topic over time and create new policy proposals.¹² This may make certain policies more affordable or more appealing than before.

In a European context, the official agenda setter is the European Commission. The Commission has the sole right to submit proposals; however, the European Parliament, the Council, and other EU institutions may ask the Commission to submit proposals on issues they deem to be important.¹³ For the EU agenda, it is critical that topics are framed in a way that highlights the necessity for action by all member states.¹⁴ Since there are many different actors, it makes it somewhat easier to put an item on the agenda because there is usually at least one person involved in EU decision-making that is interested and willing to support it; however, there still must be enough support for the issue to go further.¹⁵ Therefore, at the EU level, it is important that issues have a wide impact and an extensive range of support from EU decision-makers in order to make it a high priority.

¹¹ Ibid., 166.

¹² Ibid., 17.

¹³ Princen, "Agenda-setting", 23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 32.

¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

C. Policy Formulation, Implementation, Evaluation

After a problem has been identified and reached the agenda, policy makers begin to create the actual policies. In some situations, the issue may become a trend and in the case of the EU, other policy areas may start to pursue the same issue.¹⁶ Baumgartner and Jones described this type of policy diffusion with a logistic growth curve (S-shaped curve). With this idea, policies are slowly adopted, but then the rate of adoption increases for a period of time as others begin to implement similar policies. Once the saturation point is reached, policy adoption slows down.¹⁷ I argue this is occurring at the EU level with policies about demographic change, and I will discuss this in detail in a later section.

Following policy formulation, the policies are implemented and then the situation is evaluated at a later point. For EU directives and regulations, there is usually a specified period of time granted to member states to implement the new policies. Many of the policies about population ageing have been implemented or approved only within the last few years, making it difficult to provide an adequate evaluation, which is the main reason I will not be focusing on implementation and evaluation. After the policies have been evaluated, if there are still problems to be addressed, then the policy process restarts. If the policy makers are satisfied with the end result, then their focus will turn towards another issue.

Now that a theoretical foundation has been laid, I will use the policy process to explain and analyze how the topic of demographic change and population ageing has evolved over the past few decades. The next section will focus on providing a basic definition of the problem at hand and briefly describe how the problem has developed.

¹⁶ Baumgartner and Jones, *Agendas*, 17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

III. So What if the Population Ages?

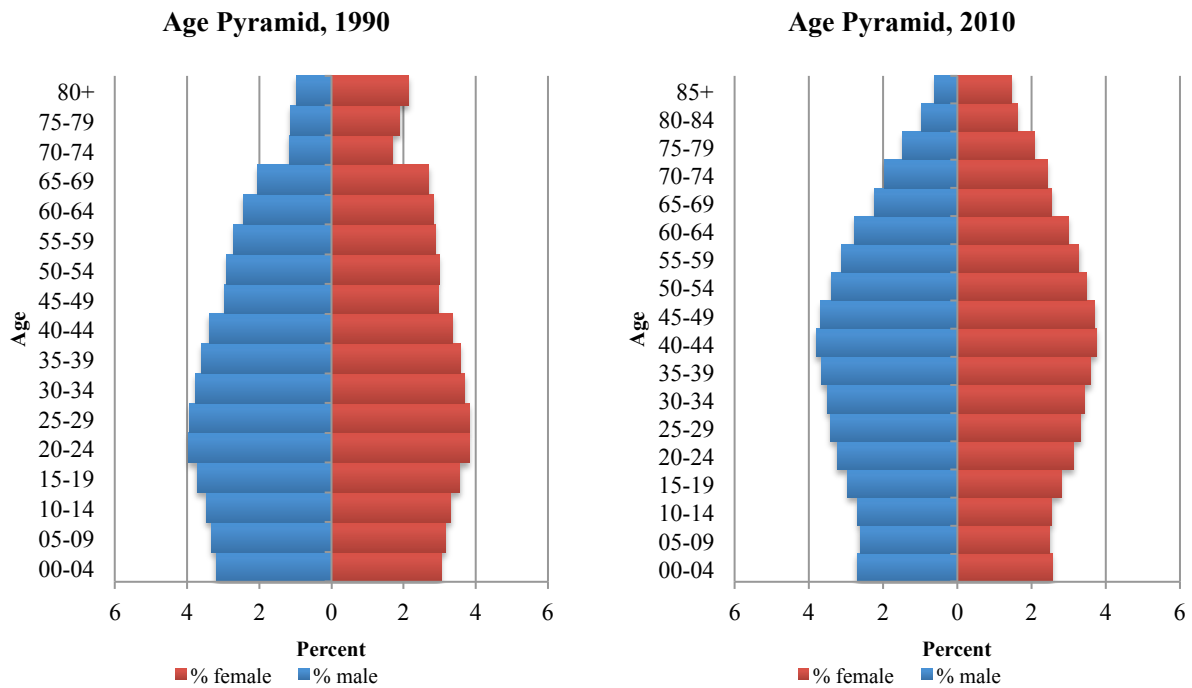
Over the past decade, people have begun to hear more about population ageing, the declining fertility rate, and the decreasing size of the working population. But what does this mean exactly and why is it important? According to the EU and its member states, population ageing is a significant topic that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. To explain why it is important and how the EU is addressing this issue, I will use the basic theoretical background laid out in the previous section. The first step in understanding this issue is to explain what the EU means when it says “demographic change” or “population ageing”, i.e. define the problem. In this section, I will focus on describing how demographic ageing is defined. Within the upcoming sections, I will break down this discussion to highlight how the problem has been redefined and evolved on the agenda.

A. The Demographic Situation of Europe

Probably the most well known image representing demographic change is the age pyramid (see Figure 1). A traditional age pyramid, which represents the population distribution by age at a certain point in time, is widest at the bottom, less so in the middle, and begins to narrow at the top. Following World War II, the “baby-boomer” generation expanded the age pyramid; however, the dramatic increase in the fertility rate did not remain high once the baby-boomers reached childbearing age, creating a bulge in the pyramid. Over time, it became apparent that birth rates were declining and people were living longer. These

changes began to alter the EU's age pyramid: "This evolution is reflected in the shape of the traditional population pyramid turning into a population column which, in the next century, could develop in a reverse, unstable and truncated pyramid."¹⁸

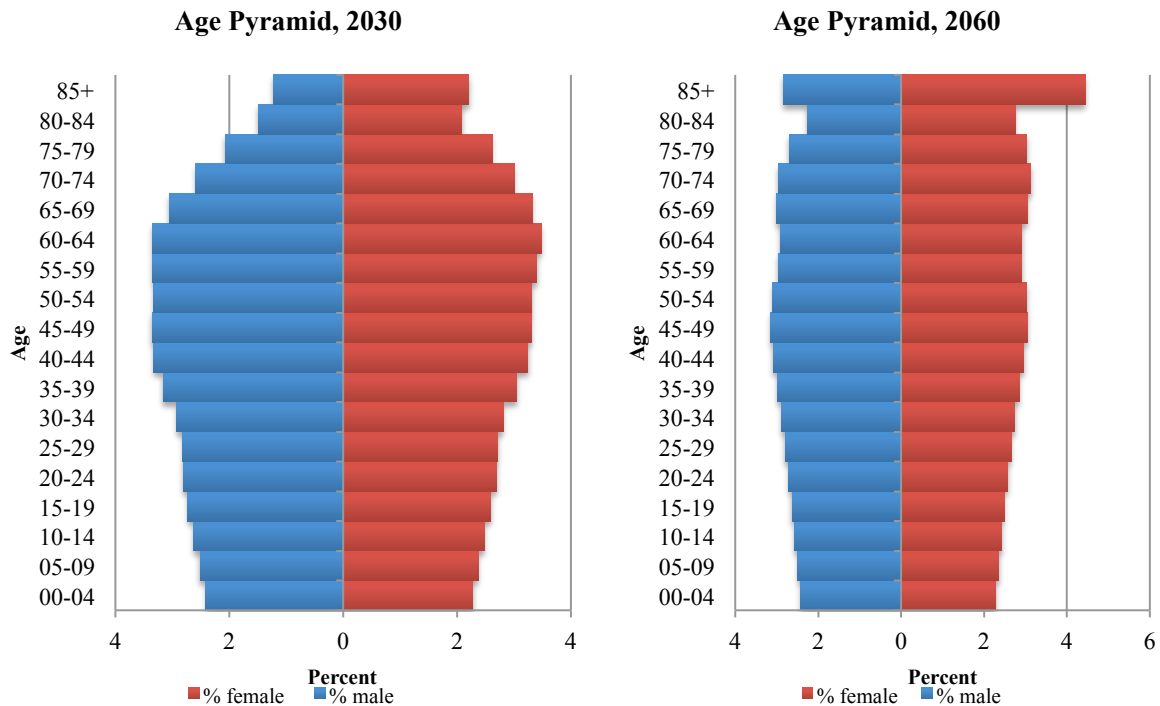
Figure 1. Age Pyramids of the EU-27^{19,20}



¹⁸ Communication COM(90) 80 on the elderly: Proposal for a Council Decision on Community Action for the Elderly, 24 April 1990, 2.

¹⁹ "1st January population by sex and 5-year age groups," Eurostat, accessed March 12, 2012, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=proj_10c2150p&lang=en.

²⁰ "Population on 1 January by five years age groups and sex," Eurostat, accessed March 12, 2012, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjangroup&lang=en.



In 1978, a study was presented by the Directorate-General (DG) for Economic and Financial Affairs in response to a question from the Fourth Medium-Term Economic Policy Program of the Commission about the increase in young people nearing working age and what impact this may have on the labor market.²¹ This report noted, “A major demographic change will undoubtedly have far-reaching long-term effects on the economy.”²² Projections were also made for 1995 that natural population growth in the member states would be lower in the upcoming 20 years. It was projected that the number of people over the age of 65 would increase by slightly more than three million.²³ Already in 1978, projections were being

²¹ Report II/528/77 from the European Commission Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs on the economic implications of demographic change in the Community, 1975-1995, June 1978, 1a.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 17.

made for 2050 predicting declines in the working age population and increases in the older population.²⁴

Since these initial projections, further research has been done to predict the future outlook for the EU population. In 1994, the EU's demographic report acknowledged it was likely that the population will decrease in the future.²⁵ Five years later, in a communication about the future of sustainable pensions, EU officials viewed population ageing as having a negative impact on the European social model, and unless steps were taken, it could undermine the system.²⁶ By 2009, the median age was 40.6 years, but by 2060, the median age was predicted to increase to 47.9 years. The population over the age of 60 had already begun to increase and was rising at a rate of two million each year.²⁷ From the projections, it was predicted that in the next 50 years, those over the age of 65 in the EU will make up 30 percent of the population (17.4 percent in 2009) and the majority of this growth will occur between 2020 and 2040.²⁸ With the baby-boomer generation entering retirement, the EU's age pyramid will become more top-heavy.

But how has the EU defined this ageing problem to make it an area of concern? In the next section, I will look at the general definition of population ageing and how the EU has defined and framed the issue to make it a EU level concern.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Report COM(94) 595 final by the Commission on the demographic situation of the European Union, 13 December 1994, 1.

²⁶ Communication COM(2000) 622 from the Commission to the Council, to the European Parliament and to the Economic and Social Committee on the future evolution of social protection from a long-term point of view: Safe and Sustainable Pensions, 11 October 2000, 2.

²⁷ Report from the Commission and Eurostat, Demography Report 2010: Older, more numerous and diverse Europeans, March 2011, 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 66.

B. The EU's Definition

The demographic challenge facing the EU involves a decline in the fertility rate, an increase in the older population, and a decrease in the working age population. From what has been presented, the degree of the situation's severity has grown since 1978 and policy makers are realizing that action needs to be taken. Even though demographic change is an issue in itself, the topic had to be defined in such a way that it was high on the agenda and that it was apparent how wide ranging its impact would be.

When the issue of demographic change first arose, the labor market was the main area of concern. In the 1978 report, the fact that the economy and labor force would be greatly affected, particularly the change in the available labor force, was highlighted.²⁹ Since this first report, labor force participation and the concern surrounding the decline in the working population have remained the main focus for the EU. With the ageing population, there is a crucial need to improve the working conditions for older workers, for example, by ending age discrimination in the labor market and making it easier for older workers to work longer if they want.³⁰ If these changes are not made, then there are future negative economic consequences. In 2007, it was projected the annual growth rate in GDP for the EU-25 could fall due to ageing from 2.4 percent during 2004-2010 to 1.2 percent between 2030 and 2050.³¹ This projection highlights the importance of maintaining older people in the labor market and the impact population ageing can have on the EU economy if ignored.

²⁹ Report II/528/77, 1a.

³⁰ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, "Strategies for an Ageing Workforce: Conference Report," Turku, 12-13 August 1999, 3.

³¹ Opinion 2007/C 161/19 of the European Economic and Social Committee on The family and demographic change, 14 March 2007, 3.8.

Another area policy makers use to frame population ageing as an important issue is through the pension system. Europe is known for its social welfare policies, many of which are pay-as-you-go, which means current workers contribute to these systems and receive the benefits once they retire. With a decline in the working age population and an increase in pensioners, the system is becoming strained. Higher life expectancy is also adding to the strain, since more people are receiving pensions for a longer period of time. Therefore, policy makers are defining demographic change as a threat to the pension system, which helps place the topic high on the agenda since EU citizens are concerned about being able to receive the pension they believe they are entitled to. Similarly, health related policies are another area of focus because in order for older workers to work longer, they need to be healthy, and with more people living longer, there will be a greater need for improved healthcare services. It is important for the EU that member states are able to provide the necessary care for their older citizens, while not creating too much strain on their national budgets. These concerns about the impact of population ageing on two important aspects of the European social systems will keep this topic high on the agenda.

In 1989, following a meeting about family policies, demographic change was characterized through a decline in the fertility rate and increase in life expectancy, which will increase the size of the older population. This meeting connected demographic change with family policies and the need to make it easier for women to work and raise children simultaneously.³² Since 1989, policies making it difficult for couples to have children and actively participate in the labor force have been seen as a cause of demographic change due to women feeling they have to choose one or the other. This topic is also related to gender

³² Conclusions 89/C 277/02 of the Council and of the ministers responsible for family affairs meeting within the Council of 29 September 1989 regarding family policies, Paragraph 2.

equality and improving the female employment rate. Demographic change has been defined as a result of these former policies and highlights the even greater need for change.

Overall, there are several different ways that policy makers can define demographic change to connect it with other policy areas of the EU. The labor market and economic sector have always been important elements of the EU and maintaining a large labor force will be difficult with a decline in the working population. Europe is known for its generous pension systems and quality healthcare, both of which are being jeopardized by population ageing since more demands will be placed on the systems. Finally, in order to help reverse population ageing, it is important that EU citizens are able to reconcile having a career and a family without having to choose one or the other. This means that insufficient and unsupportive family policies have a large impact on demographic change. To summarize, demographic change has been defined to illustrate its influence on multiple areas of EU policy, increasing its salience as a topic for debate.

IV. Something to Talk About

In the previous section, I discussed how the EU views demographic change and how it has defined and framed the issue. The next step is to put the issue on the agenda as a high priority. For the EU, defining demographic change in terms of economic and labor market concerns helped focus more attention on the issue. Over time, mainly in the 21st century, different policy areas have placed population ageing on their agendas, such as the information and technology sector, and new definitions have redefined population ageing to include a wider range of EU organizations and outside groups. I have identified two different periods of the demographic debate in Europe: In this section, I will examine the demographic debate prior to 2000. Then, I will look at the debate during the 21st century. I will discuss how demographic change has appeared on the EU agenda and how the topic has evolved.

A. Starting the Debate

In 1978, a report was released by the European Commission on the economic implications of demographic change within the European Community. This report stated that a “major demographic change” would have long-term effects on the European economy and stressed the impact it would have on the labor market.³³ It appears that the topic of demographic change was first brought to the attention of EU policy makers in this report; however, based on the projections, there was no immediate need expressed to address the

³³ Report II/528/77, 1a.

situation. The long-term predictions were made for 2050 and found there would be an increase in the older population to 18 percent (in 1975 it was 13 percent), but the working age population would also increase to 64 percent (63 percent in 1975).³⁴ With this report, policy makers became aware of a possible new population structure and what it could mean for the EU, but the report did not seem to view the change as a reason for concern. Since the numbers in which the projections were based on were relatively high, the projections did not paint a picture of significant changes in the future population, which most likely contributed to the fact that a sense of urgency or pressure on policy makers to act did not arise.

In 1983, the UN put ageing on its agenda with the *Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging*. This action plan emphasized several different aspects that needed to be addressed to tackle population ageing, such as improving the labor situation of older people, providing better opportunities for continued education, and removing stereotypes about older people from society.^{35,36} Even though EU member states are also UN members, the influence of the international agenda was not strong enough to further the awareness and acceptance by the EU to start tackling this future reality. A report five years later by the EU on the economic situation in the European Community briefly mentioned population ageing by stating that an increase in the female employment rate may help offset the effects of this ageing; however, this report did not go further.³⁷ The need to increase women's employment,

³⁴ Ibid., 22.

³⁵ United Nations World Assembly on Aging, *Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging*, held in Vienna from 26 July to 6 August 1982, III.A.1.31h.

³⁶ Ibid., III.A.3.g

³⁷ Council Decision (88/655/EEC) adopting the annual report on the economic situation in the Community and laying down economic policy guidelines for 1989 of 21 December 1988, B.3.

as well as improve family policies to increase the fertility rate, was highlighted again in 1989.³⁸

By 1990, however, the discussion regarding the older population began to rise on the agenda. The Commission released a communication specifically focused on community action for the elderly, which acknowledged the change in the shape of the EU age pyramid and the implications it will have in the future.³⁹ In this communication, the main focus was the strengths of older people, along with the need to direct more attention on this group instead of disregarding and not valuing them as active citizens. To achieve this, the communication proposed that 1993 be the European Year of the Elderly and of Solidarity between Generations and created three objectives to be achieved from 1991 to 1993.⁴⁰ The objectives were to contribute to the creation of “preventative strategies to meet the economic and social challenges of an ageing population”, find ways to strengthen the relationship between the generations and better integrate the elderly, and finally, highlight and develop a more positive image of the elderly to the Community.⁴¹ By the end of the EY1993, it seemed unclear as to whether or not a great deal of progress was made in raising awareness or improving the elderly’s situation. The document marking the end of the EY1993 emphasized the areas that member states need to focus on to improve the situation of the elderly in their

³⁸ Conclusions (89/C 277/02) of the Council and of the ministers responsible for family affairs meeting within the Council of 29 September 1989 regarding family policies.31 October 1989.

³⁹ Communication COM(90) 80 on the Elderly, 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Ibid., 22.

countries.⁴² Based on this document, the success of the EU in achieving the objectives of the year is unclear since there was not a large focus on improvements made at the EU level.

This focus on the member states was confirmed in the EY1993 evaluation report released in 1995. At the European level, the EU's main achievement was acting as a platform for member states to come together and share information about policies for older people.⁴³ Another accomplishment was the Council resolution to promote flexible retirement ages, which emphasized the need to provide older workers with the opportunity to work longer if they wanted.⁴⁴ The evaluation report also stressed the need for work to continue in the area of labor and the need for increased involvement by employer organizations and labor ministries.⁴⁵ Looking at this report, it appears population ageing was finally established on the agenda, but its position and level of importance was in flux for some time. The impact of demographic change on the labor market seemed to attract the most attention with policies focusing on improving older workers' employment opportunities and ending age discrimination. If not before, the EY1993 appeared to put demographic change on the agendas of the member states, a positive development, but major activity at the EU level still appeared minimal.

When looking at the level of public concern or interest in demographic change, it does not appear it was truly present or at a meaningful level. A 1993 Eurobarometer survey

⁴² Declaration (93/C 343/01) of Principles of the Council of the European Union and the Ministers for Social Affairs to mark the end of the European Year of the elderly and of solidarity between generations, 6 December 1993, articles 9-12.

⁴³ Proposal COM(95) 53 final 2 for a Council decision on Community Support for Actions in favor of Older People: Community actions for older people 1991-1993 including the European Year of Older People and Solidarity between Generations Evaluation Report 1994, 5 April 1995, 4.

⁴⁴ Resolution (93/C 188/01) of the Council on flexible retirement arrangements, 30 June 1993.

⁴⁵ COM(95) 53 final 2, 42.

conducted about age and attitudes displayed some of the areas where improvements needed to be made. For example, a number of respondents believed that older workers are discriminated against in the labor market and they favored government action to put a stop to such behavior.⁴⁶ There was also a majority of people that did not think their governments did enough for older people.⁴⁷ Through this survey, it appears that some issues related to ageing were a concern of EU citizens and they did want their governments to take action, however, it is difficult to say how pressing these issues truly were. Based on the EU's actions and their focus of making improvements in the member states, it does not appear as if the EU public was very concerned, at least not at a supranational level, and was most likely not creating a large amount, if any, pressure on the EU to act.

As the decade wore on, there was an increase in the level of attention demographic change received. Multiple reports on the EU's demographic situation were released (1994, 1995, 1998), all of which placed most of the focus on the need to address older workers' employment rates. During the Finish Presidency in 1999, a conference was held in Turku, Finland to discuss strategies for an ageing workforce. Similar to earlier rhetoric, participants, who included policy makers from the EU and the member states, discussed the need to improve employment policies, especially ending early retirement policies.⁴⁸ The need to retain older workers in the labor force was stressed because their continued early exit would put more pressure on the pension system since more people would be relying on the financial benefits longer. This point was also highlighted in the *Communication Towards a Europe for*

⁴⁶ Commission of the European Communities, "Age and Attitudes: Main results from a Eurobarometer study," Brussels, 1993, 26.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁸ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 8.

All Ages from 1999, in addition to the need to prevent the exclusion of older people from the labor market and society.⁴⁹ Like the previous documents, this communication focused heavily on employment and the labor market. Few other areas of concern were mentioned and discussed in as much detail.

There was one opinion released by the Committee of the Regions that included a call for more research in the area of population ageing to discover how to resolve the problems facing the EU.⁵⁰ The opinion had three areas the Committee believed should receive special attention, which included the ageing population. It argued that further research in this area is important to help address age-related illnesses and to improve the impact ageing will have on the healthcare budget. However, this area of research, along with information and communication technology (ICT), is not addressed until later in the 21st century. Healthcare policies were briefly mentioned, mainly in the context of finding cost effective and appropriate care services for the older population.⁵¹ Otherwise, demographic change appeared on the agenda mainly as a labor market concern.

By looking at how the discussion surrounding demographic change developed, it is evident that by the end of the 1990s, there was still much to be done. The topic had a solid place on the EU agenda as a concern for the labor market. I found there were no major policies created during this time besides the resolution for establishing flexible retirement in the member states. The majority of the discussion revolved around what member states

⁴⁹ Communication COM(1999) 221 from the Commission on Towards a Europe for All Ages: Promoting Prosperity and Intergenerational Solidarity, 12 May 1999, 10-12.

⁵⁰ Opinion CdR 158/97 final of the Committee of Regions on the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision concerning the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Community for research, technological development and demonstration activities (1998-2002), 15 December 1997, 3.3.3.2.

⁵¹ European Symposium, "Towards a society for all ages: Employment, Health, Pensions and Intergenerational Solidarity Conference Paper," Vienna, 12 October 1998, 29.

needed to do at the national level and it was more about ensuring that population ageing was or remained the focus of the national agendas, which for many countries was already true. During this initial phase, policies were formulated at the national level and it was the EU's role to bring this topic to the European level and create a platform for member states to come together to address a common problem.

V. Picking Up the Pace

Once demographic change and population ageing were firmly established on the EU agenda, the question arose as to whether this would mean anything and if serious action would be taken to address the situation. By the end of the 1990s, more attention was being placed on demographic change. The projections presented in the 1997 demography report predicted that in the next twenty years (1997-2017), the number of 20- to 29-year-olds would decrease by eleven million and the number of those between the ages of 50 and 64 would increase by 16.5 million.⁵² It was evident the population was changing and the window of time to act before it would be too late was closing. In this section, I will divide the demographic debate of the 21st century into the different areas of focus, since over the past twelve years, more policy makers have begun to notice how wide ranging the impact of demographic change is.

A. Redefining Ageing

One important aspect of the discussion surrounding demographic change within the past decade is the focus on active ageing. This concept began to appear at the beginning of the 21st century and was defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002 as “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance

⁵² European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, *Demographic Report 1997*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998, 12.

quality of life as people age.”⁵³ The WHO definition takes the approach of ageing as a life-cycle process that should not only focus on the older population, but also include other generations to improve the overall ageing process. It also recognizes the need to offer equal opportunities for people in all aspects of life.⁵⁴ Following the UN’s Second World Assembly on Ageing establishing the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (MIPAA), in 2002, the EU issued a response supporting the goals outlined in the MIPAA and supported the idea that ageing policies should have a “broad life-course and society-wide approach.”⁵⁵

Over the past decade, the EU has continued with this approach of active ageing by involving other policy areas in tackling demographic change. Instead of solely concentrating on employment, as was the case prior to 2000, the issue has grown to include ICT, family related policies, and the need to strengthen intergenerational solidarity, as well as the need to focus more on sustainable pensions. There is also recognition of the need to improve the availability of training programs to enable older workers to remain active and competitive in the work environment. This policy approach addresses ageing from many different angles and does not consider it only a labor market problem; in addition, instead of only concentrating on the years right before retirement, the idea is now that the policy focus also involves both the entire working career and the time spent in retirement. In this section, I will look at the different areas that address population ageing and will examine whether these policies uphold the idea of active ageing in the EU.

⁵³ World Health Organization, *Active Ageing: A Policy Framework*, Geneva: WHO, 2002, 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁵ Communication COM(2002) 143 final from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Europe’s response to world ageing: Promoting economic and social progress in an ageing world, a contribution of the European Commission to the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing, 18 March 2003, 2.

B. Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

At the start of the 21st century, the stage was set to address population change by tackling weaknesses in the labor market. The Lisbon Strategy created at the Lisbon European Council in 2000 agreed to set new goals to “strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion”, including efforts to modernize the European Social Model through investing in people and creating an active welfare state.⁵⁶ To keep up with changing technology, the need to place more emphasis on lifelong learning was highlighted because it allows workers to adapt to changes in the workplace or find a new job later in life.⁵⁷ These goals were followed up at the Stockholm European Council in 2001, which set targets for the 2010 employment rate; specifically, one target was set to increase the average EU employment rate of older men and women (55-64 years old) to 50 percent by 2010.⁵⁸ As the presidency conclusions stated: “The ageing society calls for clear strategies for ensuring the adequacy of pension systems as well as of healthcare systems and care of the elderly, while at the same time maintaining sustainability of public finances and intergenerational solidarity.”⁵⁹ With this recognition of the situation at hand, these Council meetings laid the foundation for the EU to address population ageing and improve the opportunities for older people to remain active in the labor force.

Once the goals were set for the decade, it was a matter of addressing how the employment goals were going to be met. In 2001, the EU Employment and Social Policy for

⁵⁶ Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, article 24.

⁵⁷ Ibid., article 29.

⁵⁸ Presidency Conclusions of Stockholm European Council, 23 and 24 2001, article 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., article 32.

1999 to 2001 mentioned both goals established in Lisbon and Stockholm. To address the need for higher employment rates of older people, the policy highlighted the need for creating active ageing policies and changing how older workers are viewed to increase their employment rate, which will in turn help reach the Stockholm targets. Member states were encouraged to work towards providing the opportunities for older workers to receive training to help them maintain their working capacity, in addition to providing more flexible working arrangements.⁶⁰ The momentum to find ways to ensure that these employment goals were reached continued in January 2002 with the report, *Increasing labour [sic] force participation and promoting active ageing*. This Commission report outlined the aims for the EU to reach these targets: ensure the current and future working generations remain active as they age; increase the number of those capable of working, but presently inactive, to enter the work force for a lasting basis; and, finally, maintain the participation of today's older workers.⁶¹ Also, the importance of making jobs and the working environment attractive and friendly enough to workers, particularly older workers, to want to remain in the labor market was stressed.⁶² Improving the overall work experience and allowing workers to participate in training programs are critical aspects of active ageing and make it possible for older workers to stay active longer.

These ideas were reconfirmed in March 2002 in the EU's response to the World Assembly on Ageing, which stated: "Core active ageing practices include life long learning,

⁶⁰ European Commission Directorate-General Employment, *EU Employment and Social Policy 1999-2001*, Brussels, European Communities, 2001, 15.

⁶¹ Report COM(2002) 9 final requested by the Stockholm European Council from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Increasing labour force participation and promoting active ageing*, 24 January 2002, 8-9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 11.

working longer, retiring later and more gradually, being active after retirement and engaging in capacity enhancing and health sustaining activities.”⁶³ The communication went on to stress the importance of taking full advantage of the older work force and creating policies that motivate older workers to use this opportunity of having a better position in the labor market.⁶⁴ One of the key challenges mentioned was working towards “securing a sufficient labor force to provide for a growing population of retired people.”⁶⁵ This entails creating an environment that allows people to be economically active as long as they want, which is one of the main ideas behind the labor policies addressing demographic change.

These basic ideas for promoting a more active, older, working population by improving working environments, bettering chances of being employed, and increasing the availability of training programs were reiterated by the EU in the majority of the discussions about the labor market and demographic change.⁶⁶ Not only was maintaining older workers

⁶³ Communication COM(2002) 143 final, 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁶ The additional official documents that included the discussion of the need to continue working towards promoting improving the labor market included the Opinion COM(2005) 141 final of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, in accordance with Article 128 of the EC Treaty, 17 November 2005; the Opinion 2005/C 157/28 of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘Relations between the generations’, 28 June 2005; Communication COM(2006) 62 final from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Joint report on social protection and social inclusion 2006, 13 February 2006; Communication COM(2006) 481 final from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems, 8 September 2006; Communication COM(2008) 868 final from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on new skills for new jobs: anticipating and matching labor market and skills needs, 16 December 2008; Council Conclusions from the 2947th Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg on Equal Opportunities for women and men: active and dignified ageing, 8 June 2009; Resolution COM(2010) 462 by the European Parliament on the proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012), 7 July 2011; Opinion 2011/C 318/01 of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The future of the labour market in Europe – in search of an effective response to demographic trends’ (exploratory opinion), 473rd Plenary Session, 13 and 14

in the labor market longer an important aspect of reaching the employment rate targets, but it was also crucial that policies providing the option for early retirement come to an end. This important policy change was mentioned at the end of the 1990s, but continued to be a critical area for policy change in the 2000s.

In 2000, a communication from the Commission on safe and sustainable pensions discussed the importance of reaching the employment targets and achieving full employment potential to help maintain the pension system. One important aspect is putting an end to the premature exit of older workers from the labor force: “Today in most Member States the effective retirement age is well below the normal eligibility age in statutory pension schemes.”⁶⁷ Prolonged support of early retirement only leads to more pressure on the pension systems to support more people longer and it decreases the size of the working population even more. The end of early retirement has continually been stressed as one of the main ways of improving the employment rate of older workers. In the Presidency Conclusions from the 2002 Barcelona European Council, the Spanish Presidency noted the need to increase the participation of older people in the labor force and to do this, efforts to support active ageing should include reducing early retirement.⁶⁸ This call on the member states to reduce early retirement has continued throughout the 2000s in the effort of reaching the Stockholm employment rate targets and providing older workers the opportunity to lead an active life.⁶⁹

July 2011; Report from the Employment Committee on Reaching the Employment Target: Progress and Thematic Surveillance, November 2011, unpublished.

⁶⁷ Communication COM(2000) 622, 9.

⁶⁸ Presidency Conclusions of the Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002, 42.

⁶⁹ Additional official documents that called for a reduction in early retirement options included Communication COM(2001) 362 final from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee: Supporting national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions through an integrated

At the end of 2010, the Stockholm goal for older people's employment had not been met. The employment rate had increased by 8.6 percent between 2000 and 2010, but fell short of the 50 percent target at only 46.3 percent.⁷⁰ In 2010, new employment targets were set as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. Instead of creating a new target employment rate specifically for older workers, a general employment rate of 75 percent for those between the ages of 20 and 64 was set for 2020.⁷¹ This new goal may help to improve the employment rate of older people, but the risk is that less focus will be placed on older workers since there is no specific goal in mind.

This new employment rate goal continues to focus on improving employment in the EU. Many of the same ideas and measures from the first decade are reiterated in EU policy documents in 2011. There is still the need to improve the employment rate of older people and continue to try and reduce options for early retirement.⁷² Additionally, in 2011, active ageing became a major topic of discussion as the EU prepared for the EY2012. By having this EY2012, one of the main goals is to improve the working conditions for older people.

approach, 3 July 2001; Opinion 2005/C 157/28 of the European Economic and Social Committee on "Relations between the Generations", 28 June 2005; Communication COM(2009) 180 final from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU (2009 Ageing Report), 29 April 2009; European Commission, Green Paper COM(2010) 365 final towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems, 7 July 2010; Commission Staff Working Document COM(2010) 462 Ex-Ante Evaluation, Accompanying document to the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012), 6 September 2010.

⁷⁰ Report from the Employment committee on Reaching the Employment Target: Progress and Thematic Surveillance, November 2011, unpublished, 55.

⁷¹ Communication COM(2010) 2020 final from the Commission on Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, 3 March 2010, 5.

⁷² These same ideas were reiterated in: European Commission, Committee of the Regions and AGE Platform Europe, *How to promote active ageing in Europe: EU support to local and regional actors*", Brussels: AGE Platform Europe, 2011, and Report 7396/11 from the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council to the European Council of the Joint Employment Report 2011, 8 March 2011.

Like much of the previously mentioned EU documents, the EY2012 aims for all member states to adopt active ageing policies by “integrating the rights and needs of older persons into their national economic and social policies and by promoting a society for all ages.”⁷³ With this year and the new employment goals, the EU has laid out its plan to tackle demographic change in the labor market more intensely in the new decade.

C. Everyone Wants a Pension

Like labor market concerns, the maintenance of the pension system is another critical concern of the EU and its citizens. When the talk about the ageing population began, fears of not being able to sustain the pension system due to an increase in pensioners and a decrease in contributors were already surfacing. These concerns only continued into the 21st century as the reality of the situation was becoming clearer and it was recognized that pension systems needed to be reformed in order to maintain the system. In 2000, a communication was released about the future of sustainable pensions. Due to population ageing, it was projected states would spend around 15 to 20 percent of their GDP on state pension schemes in 2030 if no changes were made to the systems. This would require working generations to contribute more to the system. The report stressed the need for member states to reform their pension systems so they are “mutually supportive and more conducive to the promotion of economic growth and social cohesion.”⁷⁴ Due to the ageing of the baby-boomer generation and their entrance into retirement, the old-age dependency ratio was predicted to rise over the next 30

⁷³ AGE Platform Europe, *European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations: 2012 Everyone has a role to play!* Brussels: AGE Platform Europe, 2011, 4.

⁷⁴ Communication COM(2000) 622 final, 3.

to 40 years; it was projected that by 2050, the ratio of working-age people per pensioner would be 1.8 at the EU level, which is down from 3.8 in 2000.⁷⁵ With these figures, it was clear reforms needed to be made in order for member states to be able to provide a pension for retirees and maintain solidarity between the working and retired generations.

The following year at the Göteborg European Council during the Swedish Presidency, the Council supported three broad principles that would help secure the sustainability of the pension systems in the future. These included “safeguarding the capacity of systems to meet their social objectives, maintaining their financial stability and meeting changing societal needs.”⁷⁶ At the Barcelona European Council one year later, the European Council called for a faster reform of the pension system to safeguard the financial sustainability of the systems and their ability to meet their social objectives.⁷⁷ If the discussion of the need to reform pension systems at these two European Council meetings was not a clear sign that population ageing and its effect on the pension system was an important topic on the agenda, then the communication released a month after the Göteborg meeting spelled it out: “The modernization of pension systems is...high on the political agenda in all Member States. National policy makers...remain responsible for pension systems and have to prepare for the impact of ageing on their pension systems while continuing the adaptation of these systems to reflect societal change.”⁷⁸ This push for member states to reform their pension systems to

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁶ Presidency Conclusions, Göteborg European Council, 15 and 16 June 2001, 10.

⁷⁷ Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona European Council, 15 and 16 March 2002, 9.

⁷⁸ Communication COM(2001) from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee: Supporting national strategies for safe and sustainable pensions through an integrated approach, 3 July 2001, 2.

ensure they account for sustainability and the changing population structure continued throughout the decade.⁷⁹

The EU does appear to have taken a slightly more active role in encouraging and supporting member states in their effort to make reforms. Following a Council meeting on financial and economic affairs in 2006, the Council recognized that member states had made reforms to their pension systems, which were having positive impacts; however, the Council stated the scale of the reforms were still insufficient.⁸⁰ In the 2009 communication about dealing with the effects of an ageing population, the Commission addressed the area of funded pensions and their intent to “work with the Council and the Member States to identify lessons for scheme design, regulatory frameworks regarding insolvency protection, and target beneficiaries in order to secure adequate and sustainable private pension provision in Member States.”⁸¹ This type of cooperation is recognized as necessary and beneficial to allow ideas to be developed and exchanged among policy makers at all levels, and this recognition was restated in the Green Paper on sustainable and safe pensions in 2010. In 2011, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) released an opinion on the

⁷⁹ This policy stance was reiterated in the following documents: Communication COM(2003) 773 final from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the joint report on social inclusion: summarizing the results of the examination of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2003-2005), 12 December 2003; Communication COM(2005) 658 final from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the review of the Sustainable Development Strategy: A platform for action, 13 December 2005; Opinion COM(2005) 141 final of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States, in accordance with Article 128 of the EC Treaty, 17 November 2005; Draft Joint Report 6500/10 from the Social Protection Committee on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010, 15 February 2010.

⁸⁰ Press Release 6052/06, 270th Council Meeting of Economic and Financial Affairs, Brussels, 14 February 2006, 9.

⁸¹ Communication COM(2009) 180 final from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU (2009 Ageing Report), 29 April 2009, 10.

future of the labor market in the EU and addressed how they viewed some of the pension related reforms that have occurred. The EESC argued that funded pension schemes are not an “appropriate response to an ageing society” and actually increase costs.⁸²

The impact of population ageing on pension systems has helped put demographic change high on the agenda due to the importance of maintaining the European social welfare system. Policy makers understand how critical it is that retirees receive their pension and it is necessary that a balanced relationship between those contributing to the system and those taking from the system be maintained. It is apparent that this issue is now high on the agenda and that policy makers at all levels are working towards addressing the issue to ensure that retirees will be able to receive a pension, even once the number of contributors declines. By providing retirees with a pension, they are able to lead a more active and comfortable lifestyle as they age, which contributes to older people having a healthy life and being able to participate in society, thereby promoting active ageing.

D. Being Healthy in Old Age

The main idea of active ageing is to provide equal opportunity and equal treatment in all aspects of life as a person ages; it is about making suitable protection, security, and care available when someone needs them.⁸³ Improvements in the labor market are providing more equal opportunities for older workers, reforms to the pension systems create a more sustainable system that can provide financial security for retirees, and, as I will discuss in this

⁸² Opinion 2011/C 318/01 of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The future of the labour market in Europe – in search of an effective response to demographic trends’ (exploratory opinion), 473rd Plenary Session, 13 and 14 July 2011, article 2.2.

⁸³ AGE Platform Europe, *European Year for...*, 6.

section, the promotion of healthy ageing and better care for the older generations is also being discussed.

Prior to 2000, healthcare policies and an emphasis on improving the health systems to provide the necessary care for the increasing older generations were not overly stressed or high on the agenda. By 2002, however, the agenda began to include the need to promote healthy ageing beginning with instituting health policies and practices supporting well-being throughout life. The increase in the older population and the longer life expectancy created the necessity to address how to provide “full access to high-quality services for all while ensuring the financial sustainability of these services.”⁸⁴ By providing better healthcare and promoting a healthy lifestyle, older generations are able to stay active longer and may experience fewer health problems, both of which contribute to longer participation in the labor force and the reduced need for more social welfare to help cover their medical needs.

The impact of the ageing population on the health system had been recognized and in 2006, projections estimated that public spending on healthcare would rise by 1.5 percent of GDP and long-term care public spending would rise somewhere between 0.5 and 1 percent of GDP on average in the EU-25.⁸⁵ In order to try and reduce the economic impact of population ageing, the Commission stressed the importance of improving the cost-effectiveness of long-term care options.⁸⁶ To help achieve this, the EESC recommended that the EU create a scoreboard to keep track of how healthcare systems integrate prevention and health promotion, and the EU should compare the goals of the healthcare systems in the

⁸⁴ Communication COM(2002) 143 final, 9.

⁸⁵ Press Release 6052/06, 10.

⁸⁶ Communication COM(2009) 180 final, 10.

member states.⁸⁷ More emphasis was placed on prevention, as well as the need for good medical and personal care that will enable older people to live independently longer.⁸⁸ Additional projections made in 2010 showed that if future increases in life expectancy were due to good health and fewer people experiencing disabilities, then it was likely that the rise in healthcare spending due to the ageing population would be halved.⁸⁹ In the 7th Framework Program for research and development, 6.5 billion euros were allocated for “improving health over the life cycle and, in particular, to resolving the specific health problems of older people.”⁹⁰

It was quickly recognized that healthy ageing would be a key factor in improving the ageing process and to help prevent an increased strain on the healthcare system. Policy makers understood they would need to improve the healthcare system so that it was better prepared to handle the health needs of older people and able to provide more long-term care services. In 2011, the first meeting of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing met and set a goal to increase the number of healthy life years by two by 2020.⁹¹ This target highlights the new policy approach of healthy and active ageing, with the emphasis on more preventative measures to improve the lives of older generations, while simultaneously addressing how to prevent the healthcare systems from being overburdened.

⁸⁷ Opinion 2011/C 44/02 of the European Economic and Social Committee on ‘The impact of population ageing on health and welfare systems’ (exploratory opinion), 11 February 2011, adopted 15 July 2010, article 2.2.3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., article 3.1.3.3.

⁸⁹ Commission Staff Working Document COM(2010) 462 Ex-Ante Evaluation accompanying document to the decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Active Ageing (2012), 6 September 2010, 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁹¹ Draft Minutes of the First Steering Group Meeting of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, 2 May 2011, 1.

E. Entering the Digital Age

From the previous sections, it is clear the EU has been working to address population ageing in a variety of areas, all with close connections. In the new age of technology, it is important that employees are familiar with the technology used in the workplace. To ensure that older workers are able to remain competitive in the labor market, the EU has supported the development of (re)training programs that will keep the working age population up to date with workplace change. In 2001, the Commission stressed the necessity of having a “digital literacy” in order to be employable and adaptable. The Commission also made a call in the 2001 employment guidelines on social partners to work towards providing every worker a chance to obtain “information society literacy” by 2003.⁹² Now that technology in the workplace had been addressed, policy makers are beginning to see the importance of technology in other aspects of life and more attention has been placed on using technology to address demographic change in other areas, such as assisted living.

In 2007, the EU announced that they, along with member states and the private sector, would invest one billion euros between 2007 and 2013 in research and innovation for ageing well. This money would be divided between different programs with around 600 million euros allocated for the ambient assisted living program (AAL) and 400 million euros for the EU’s latest research framework program.⁹³ The announcement of this long-term investment by the EU was related to the European Action Plan, *Ageing Well in the Information Society*,

⁹² European Commission Directorate-General Employment, *EU Employment and Social Policy 1999-2001*, 20.

⁹³ Press release IP/07/831, “€1bn euro in digital technologies for Europeans to age well”, Brussels, 14 June 2007.

which acknowledged the importance of ICT in improving the quality of life for older generations and helping them stay healthy and independent. There were three areas of focus laid out in the action plan: ageing well at work, ageing well in the community, and ageing well at home.⁹⁴ The action plan acknowledged the lack of attention usually given to older people and the need to make digital devices more accessible and user-friendly for older generations.⁹⁵ With this action plan, the Commission seeks to raise awareness about the potential of ICT in improving the lives for the ageing population and also wants to work to make it easier for businesses to work together to share and implement their ideas so they are accessible and beneficial to the European public.⁹⁶

One of the programs that received a substantial amount of funding from the EU was AAL. This program uses technology to create intelligent products and provide remote services, such as care services, that allow older people to live in their homes longer. These intelligent products and remote services provide the necessary assistance for older people so they can maintain their autonomy and live in an environment they are familiar and comfortable with.⁹⁷ For example, the program Rosetta is for individuals suffering from dementia and/or Parkinson's disease. This project incorporates ICT through the use of smart cameras to monitor users' activities; an early detection system notices changes in long-term

⁹⁴ Communication COM(2007) 332 final from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on ageing well in the information society: an i2010 initiative, action plan on information and communication technologies and ageing, 14 June 2007, 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5-6.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁷ Commission Staff Working Document COM(2008) 519 final accompanying the Report from the Commission of the annual report on research and technological development activities of the European Union in 2007, 18 August 2008, 9.

conditions; and user have a touchscreen that provides daily reminders.⁹⁸ By providing services like this, older people are able to have more input in how they live out the rest of their lives. They are also able to participate in the information society and take advantage of the type of technology that makes life easier.

ICT can also increase the efficiency and quality of healthcare through increasing early patient release and having remote monitoring systems in place.⁹⁹ There are a number of benefits for the EU and for older people by developing and promoting ICT, and the EU has recognized this fact. To make this possible, the EU action plan includes raising awareness about the benefits of ICT, removing technological and regulatory barriers to make development and production easier, and supporting the exchange of best practice between member states.¹⁰⁰ The area of ICT has proven that it is working hard to follow through with its action plan and make sure it is successful. For example, since 2007, eleven large pilot projects related to ICT and ageing have begun, which involved more than 40 European regions, and more than 30 research and development projects related to ageing have started under Framework Programs 6 and 7.¹⁰¹ This is clearly one area where population ageing is high on the agenda and they are working hard to make sure older people age actively.

⁹⁸ “About Rosetta,” Rosetta, accessed February 17, 2012, <http://www.aal-rosetta.eu/smartsite.dws?id=135330>.

⁹⁹ European Commission Directorate-General Information Society and Media, *Overview of the European strategy in ICT for Ageing Well*, Brussels, October 2010, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 6.

F. Keeping the Peace

When looking at population ageing, it is necessary to not focus just on the older generations. Since the working age population is decreasing, which means fewer contributors to the pension system, and the number of people receiving pensions is increasing, it is important to consider the younger generations and to work towards maintaining a positive relationship between the different generations. The concept of intergenerational solidarity is just that: it “refers to the mutual support and cooperation between different age groups in order to achieve a society where people of all ages have a role to play in line with their needs and capacities, and can benefit from their community’s economic and social progress on an equal basis.”¹⁰² This idea usually goes hand-in-hand with demographic change and commonly appears on the agenda alongside population ageing.

An important aspect of intergenerational solidarity is family policy since families are one of the main ways different generations interact. Addressing demographic change through family policies involves creating policies that make it easier to reconcile work life with family life. In 2009, a directive was proposed by the Council to change the framework agreement on parental leave, which would result in an increase in the length of parental leave and make the time non-transferable, in hopes that fathers will be more willing to use their parental leave.¹⁰³ As part of the EY2012, the promotion of work-life balance policies is mentioned as one of the areas that national and local policy makers can improve. This includes creating policies that support more shared responsibility of care between men,

¹⁰² AGE Platform Europe, *European Year for...*, 6.

¹⁰³ Report COM(2009) 694 final from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on equality between women and men, 18 December 2009, 6.

women, and society.¹⁰⁴ The majority of family policies initially focused on creating a more supportive environment for families that allow women and men to work and raise a family simultaneously without having to sacrifice one for the other.

During the German EU presidency in 2007, efforts were made to promote coordinated policies that would offset the fall in the fertility rate with the increase in the older population.¹⁰⁵ It was recognized that families are important care providers for young and old generations, and therefore, it is necessary to provide sufficient support and recognition, particularly through economic support, for providing care for family members in need of assistance.¹⁰⁶ This includes developing the option for a more flexible life cycle, which takes into account the possibility for career-breaks to raise children or care for older family members.¹⁰⁷ Additional EU documents, however, have not included the same emphasis since 2007, but reconciliation between work and family life still remains a central topic.

G. Summary

After looking over the EU documents discussing population ageing during the 21st century, it is apparent demographic change has risen on the EU agenda and become a focus of policy making. There are likely more areas where demographic change is considered in policy making, such as gender equality, but due to the constraints of this paper, I was not able

¹⁰⁴ AGE Platform Europe, *European Year for...*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Opinion COM(2007) 244 final of the European Economic and Social Committee on the 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Promoting solidarity between the generations', 13 December 2007, article 3.4.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., article 3.11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., article 4.5.

to explore every policy field. The labor market, pension system, and healthcare system are the major policy areas that were focused on throughout the demographic discussion. ICT, intergenerational solidarity, and family policies are additional policy areas that discussed population ageing fairly often. In the next section, I will provide an analysis of how this discussion has developed and moved through the policy process. I will also evaluate the policies and explain why I argue the EU has only truly begun to address this issue within the past few years.

VI. Making Sense of It All

The number of policies addressing demographic change over the past three decades has greatly increased. Projections today illustrate the need for action by member states and the EU to continue to try and make reforms to prevent population ageing from having a significant and negative impact on multiple EU areas, such as the labor market and on the national pension systems. But what does the future hold for the EU? Are these policies going to be enough to reduce the effects of demographic change? Is having the EY2012 an effective way to raise awareness and make necessary reforms? In this section, I will review how demographic change has advanced through the policy process and then provide an analysis of what the future may hold for the EU.

A. A Few More Stages to Complete

As stated in the introduction, the main idea of this paper is to explain the debate about demographic change using the five-step policy process. The first step is problem definition, which the EU has done. They have recognized the changing European population as the problem, which includes a decrease in fertility rate, a shrinking working age population, and the entrance of the baby-boomer generation into retirement, resulting in an increasing older population. This is the basic definition, but in order to put this topic on the EU agenda, it has typically not been framed solely in demographic terms, but as a threat to other policy areas, for example referring to its impact on the labor market or the national pension systems.

When the EU originally mentioned demographic change, there did not appear to be a wide response by policy makers to take action. It took time for the topic to rise on the agenda and, I would argue, it finally found a relatively high spot on the agenda by the 1990s with the communication that called for community action for the elderly. This communication proposed the EY1993 and for the first half of the 90s, more attention was given to the ageing population. By the end of the century, EU projections about the future structure of the population presented a situation that would create some major challenges for the EU unless action was taken to address them beforehand. In the first decade of the 21st century, a significant amount of attention was placed on addressing demographic change and it was now on the agendas of multiple policy fields, from labor market to ICT.

There was no focusing event that triggered the discussion about demographic change. Instead, it has been a gradual process of policy makers realizing the severity of the problem if they continued to ignore it. When the first projections were made in 1978, they were based on the long term assumption that the official retirement ages would decrease to age 60 for males and it was projected that the older population would only increase by four percent by 2050 (from 13.3 percent in 1978 to 17.7 percent in 2050).¹⁰⁸ These projections did not indicate that the population dynamics in the future would be drastically different from the 1970s. Over time, member states began to take action to address the problems in their own countries, but this was also a slow process: “It must be said that until the Treaty of Nice, Member States were relatively silent on this issue despite the fact that, for two decades, demographers had been trying to draw the attention of politicians to the impending

¹⁰⁸ Report II/528/77, 22.

‘demographic winter’ and the difficulties it would create.”¹⁰⁹ Since it took politicians so long to take notice of the situation, the EESC criticized the slow response even though warnings were given much earlier, stating in 2007, the EU is “now faced with a full-scale demographic crisis.”¹¹⁰ Even though it took policy makers some time to truly address the situation, by the end of the 2000s, it can be said that action was being taken and demographic change was high on the agenda.

When it comes to policy formation, the third step, I find this is still a work in progress. Demographic change is affecting all of the EU in some way, making it an appropriate subject for the EU to address; however, the major policy areas where reforms need to be made are mainly under the jurisdiction of member states. Therefore, the EU is limited in the types of policies it can implement to address demographic change. The majority of EU documents addressing this problem stress the need for member states to take action and make reforms in their national systems, but the EU has not implemented a large amount of legislation on this issue.

Baumgartner and Jones’ idea of policy diffusion being described as an S-shaped curve is appropriate for this situation.¹¹¹ The EU and its member states began to take notice of the situation a while ago, but policy adoption was rather slow. Eventually, as member states began to make more reforms and EU policy makers began to take notice of the situation and see the positive effects of the member states’ reforms, policy adoption at the EU level began to rise. The saturation point has not been reached yet, but once member states

¹⁰⁹ The Treaty of Nice was signed in 2001; Opinion 2007/C 161/19, article 2.2.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Baumgartner and Jones, 17.

feel they have made sufficient reforms and the EU no longer sees the same level of concern, then policy formulation and adoption may begin to fall. At this point in time, I do not see the saturation point being reached anytime soon.

Since policies are still rather new and the majority has been recently implemented, it is difficult to evaluate how successful the policies have been. It will take time for this issue to be fully addressed by the EU and to know if the policies were effective in curbing the negative effects of population ageing. For now, I will move on to discuss the future of the debate surrounding demographic change.

B. What Lies Ahead

In 2007, the then EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Vladimír Špidla, believed the EU had a “window of opportunity over the next ten years” to create appropriate policies to address the future demographic situation.¹¹² If this is true, then there are still five years for the EU to act and to prevent population ageing from having a significant impact. Whether this is true remains to be seen, but it will be interesting to see how this debate continues to develop. During the 21st century, this topic has been publicized and has been reported on by national news outlets, but it is important to also consider how the public will react to these reforms being made and whether or not the EU can be successful in improving the employment of older workers if employers still believe stereotypes of older people to be true.

¹¹² Press Release IP/07/789, “Preparing for EU’s ageing population at heart of new government expert group,” Brussels, 11 June 2007.

Recently, the results of a special Eurobarometer survey on active ageing were released. The findings from the survey show that EU citizens are aware of population ageing; however, the majority is not concerned about it, with only four in ten respondents expressing concern.¹¹³ With such a low level of concern in the population, it may be difficult for policy makers to receive public support for their policies, especially those that raise the retirement age or affect individual's pensions, because people will not understand the need for these changes and may view them as unfair. When asked about whether they agree or disagree that the official age of retirement will need to be increased by 2030, the majority of respondents disagreed.¹¹⁴ By not understanding the demographic situation and not wanting to work longer, most EU citizens may not support policies that will directly affect them in a negative way. According to an official at the DG for Employment and Social Affairs, there are concerns about an increase in the official retirement age, but more of citizens' concerns are whether they will be able to remain in the labor market longer, either due to health reasons or challenges posed by a weak labor market.¹¹⁵ Throughout the EY2012 and in the future, it will be important to educate the public about demographic change so they can understand the reason behind these policy changes and understand how these changes directly affect them.

Another important aspect to achieve successful outcomes in improving older workers' employment rates is to change the stereotypes about older people. Usually people think older workers are slow, inefficient, and bad with technology, contributing to the challenges they may face when trying to retain their job or find a new job. Even though the EU and its

¹¹³ TNS Opinion and Social, "Special Eurobarometer 378, Active Ageing, Report," conducted at the request of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, January 2012, 35-38.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹¹⁵ Interviewee 1, interviewed by Emily Lines, 30 November 2011, Brussels.

member states want to work towards increasing the employment rate of older workers, if employers still view them as inefficient and slow, how can progress be made? One response by an employee at the DG of Employment and Social Affairs stated this was one of the main areas of focus for the DG and they are working to try and combat the stereotypes to educate society to understand that older people are not a burden, but are a resource and contribution to society.¹¹⁶ When looking at the findings of the recent Eurobarometer survey, most people see older people as playing a major role in society and most believe older people are perceived positively in their country.¹¹⁷ This is an important finding and for the future, it will be critical for the EU to continue to emphasize that older people are a resource and will be needed to help maintain the social welfare systems.

Lastly, the most recent event that may hinder the continued development of active ageing policies is the current EU economic crisis. This event is a perfect example of a crisis that jumped to the top of the agenda due to the need for an immediate response and pushed other issues down the agenda. During this time, it will be important for the EU to maintain the engagement of policy makers at the supranational and national levels.¹¹⁸ It will be difficult to promote the employment of older workers and meet general employment rate goals due to the weakening of the labor market and the increased challenges to finding or maintaining a job.¹¹⁹ One positive result that may arise from the financial crisis, as seen by an employee of the DG of Information Society and Media, is that researchers may begin to turn

¹¹⁶ Interviewee 2, interviewed by Emily Lines, 29 November 2011, Brussels.

¹¹⁷ TNS Opinion and Social, "Special Eurobarometer 378, Active Ageing, Report," 25-28.

¹¹⁸ Interviewee 1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

towards more cost-effective solutions. It is important for ICT that researchers and developers are not always focused on the money, but that it is more about the solutions and finding new ways to collaborate for the sake of finding better solutions for the consumer.¹²⁰ What is clear is that EU policy makers will need to continue to work to make sure attention is placed on the EY2012 and work is done to further active ageing policies throughout the EU.

¹²⁰ Interviewee 3, interviewed by Emily Lines, 29 November 2011, Brussels.

VII. Conclusion

After analyzing the past three decades of EU work towards addressing population change, it is evident the EU has made great strides in tackling the problem. There are still a number of challenges facing the EU and more action needs to be taken soon before the full effects of the demographic change start to take effect. The policy process is an ongoing process and with most policies having developed within the past decade, policy evaluation may slowly begin. It is yet to be seen whether these policies will be successful in accomplishing their objectives and if they will help reduce the negative effects of population ageing. For the EU, it is important that they keep enough attention focused on active ageing and use any momentum and support they will gather during the EY2012 once the year has ended.

The EY2012 will be an important year to see how successful the EU can be in fully addressing this issue and educating more people about population ageing. It will be interesting to see what this year accomplishes in comparison to the EY1993. These two separate European Years have practically the same name (1993 European Year of the Elderly and Solidarity between Generations and 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations) and similar goals of raising awareness, promoting intergenerational solidarity, and providing member states with a way to share information.^{121,122} The EY1993 did succeed in starting the discussion about population ageing

¹²¹ Communication COM(95)53 final, 2.

and being a forum for member states to come together. It is too soon to say how well the EY2012 will be in achieving its goals, but the current political setting is more open and aware of the necessity to take action than in 1993. This can only help the EY2012 in being more successful and productive than the EY1993.

Looking back over what has been discussed in this paper, the ageing debate has been slowly making its way through the policy process. The EU has worked to address the issue from multiple angles and create awareness about how wide ranging this issue is. Since the majority of policies addressing this issue have been created in the past decade, it will be a few more years before the first cycle of the policy process will be completed. It will be up to EU policy makers to decide if they want to use this window of opportunity created by the EY2012 to continue to work on this issue once the year has ended or turn their focus elsewhere.

Further research will need to be conducted in the coming years to see how this issue has continued to develop and to determine how well the EY2012 accomplished the goals it set out to achieve. Based on this research, I have found that ageing and demographic change have been an issue on the EU agenda for a few decades, but until the 21st century, it was not high on the agenda. Now that the topic has risen on the agenda, more policy makers are aware and willing to discuss possible solutions. In the end, it can be said that ageing is a clear item on the EU agenda and the EU is now more dedicated to addressing the issue and making sure policies are created that will limit the impact of population ageing in the coming years.

¹²² Legislative resolution COM(2010) 462, Article 2.

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